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SIPDIS

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NSC FOR MGAVIN
DEPT PLS PASS USAID FOR AFR/SUDAN
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SUBJECT: AN UMMA FACTIONAL LEADER'S TAKE ON ELECTIONS AND
POLITICAL DYNAMICS

Classified By: CDA Robert E. Whitehead for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (c) Summary. In a rambling hour-long meeting with Charge on August 10, UMMA party factional leader Mubarak Fadail Elmahdi addressed a possible opposition boycott of elections, internal National Congress Party (NCP)/Sudanese People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) dynamics, the Lubna Hussein case, and the Southern referendum of 2011. Always well informed, Mubarak was as usual promoting his own spin. End summary.

Election Issues

2, (c) Mubarak said that despite its democratic rhetoric, the NCP was already obstructing an alliance of opposition groups from campaigning for April elections. Mubarak, an unnamed representative of the SPLM, and the head of the National Sudanese Party (NSP) had requested and received written permission to hold an open air rally on August 6, a Trojan horse political activity that was advertised as a tribute to the late Dr. John Garang. Upon arrival at the venue, however, they found armed, uniformed security forces in place. Mubarak charged that the police dispersed the crowd and took the head of the NSP to NISS headquarters where he was forced to sign a document canceling the event. He said that Deputy Speaker Atim Garang was also turned back, and that authorities subsequently cut electricity to NSP headquarters. Local newspapers had been warned not to run any stories on the incident, Mubarak continued, and only Al Jazeera provided coverage of the event. He laughingly added that censorship had gotten worse since passage of the new Press Law: the Government of Sudan (GOS) was now going directly after the papers themselves instead of those making anti-GOS statements. He said that under these circumstances it would be impossible to campaign, and the opposition would be obliged to boycott elections. On August 15 the alliance would release a statement setting out red lines for boycott. He concluded that the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) would use the NCP's refusal to allow open campaigning to opt out of the electoral process once and for all. In the end, he sighed, if those who seek change are forbidden to do so through peaceful political means, there was no choice but to get a gun.

NCP/SPLM Dynamics

13. (c) Mubarak insisted that nothing has fundamentally

changed within the NCP. President al Bashir remained an absentee landlord in day-to-day governance, and Vice President Taha and Ministers Nafie and Al Jazz together ran things from the inside. He said that Taha had been unwell recently, reportedly liver problems, and had been out of country for nearly two months to seek medical treatment in Turkey and Malaysia and visit Saudi Arabia. He noted that Taha had become very cautious about the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) because Taha had been widely castigated in the North for giving away too much at Naivasha.

14. (c) Mubarak turned to the case of Lubna Hussein, who awaits final sentencing for her arrest by Public Order police for wearing trousers in public. Bashir chortled that his brother-in-law, Dr. Ghazi Salah Eddin had told him the day before that hard-liners who continue to push the case are "idiots" that do not understand "that they are on trial, rather than her." Mubarak predicted that Hussein would not be lashed but was not so sure that SPLM Deputy Secretary General Yasr Armun would come out equally unscathed. Mubarak claimed that a furious President Bashir had asked Vice President Kiir to lift Armun's parliamentary immunity so that Armun could be charged and tried for alleged comments -- not explicitly quoted in the media -- that the Public Order police were known to use the threat of flogging to try and extract sexual favors from young girls. He said that Kiir had refused the request because compromising Armun, a Northern Arab and a SPLM military commander who is married to the daughter of Deng Majok, the paramount chief of the Ngok Dinka, would be tantamount to political suicide in the South.

Another Referendum Proposal

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15. (c) Mubarak said that he and others from the North were awaiting a SPLM Politburo decision in Juba to convene a meeting to discuss a common strategy for elections and the referendum. He said that he had recently discussed with SPLM Secretary General Pagan Amum, just returned from Washington, the possibility of arranging some sort of six year confederacy starting in 2011, with a final vote in 2017 determining the ultimate status of the South.

Comment

16. (c) Mubarak is well-plugged into the political circuits of Sudan, although we do not always buy his more extravagant claims. The former number three in government until 2004, he harbors political ambitions based upon the SPLM and other political groupings choosing an acceptable Northerner for a "anyone but Bashir" campaign. As for boycotting the electoral campaign and getting a gun, Mubarak has tried that before and ended up in prison for his pains. He was most recently imprisoned for more than six months in 2008, allegedly for once again plotting against Bashir and the NCP.
WHITEHEAD